

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 03970 01 OF 03 251034Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 250839Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3641
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 DAMASCUS 3970

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS DIA, SECDEF, USCINCEUR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINS, PINR, SY
SUBJECT: THE ASSASSINATION OF BRIG. RAZZUQ

1. SUMMARY: ASSASSINATION OF BRIG. ABD AL-KARIM RAZZUQ JUNE 18 HAS CREATED SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL STIR WITHIN SYRIA. WHILE ASSASSINS HAVE NOT BEEN ARRESTED, DAMASCENES HAVE SPECULATED AT LENGTH WHETHER THEY IRAQI AGENTS, MUSLIM BRETHERN, RELATIVES OF TWO HAMAWITES RECENTLY HANGED WHO PERPETRATED SYMBOLIC ACT AGAINST REGIME TO ACQUIT FAMILY HONOR, OR ALAWITES ENGAGED IN INTRA-SECTARIAN FEUDING. EVEN BEFORE THE INCIDENT, DAMASCUS SUNNIS WERE DISCUSSING PERCEIVED FACTIONALISM BETWEEN PRO-ASSAD ALAWRTES AND RIVAL SYMPATHIZERS OF LATE MAJ. GEN. MUHAMMAD UMRANF; THERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT RIVALRIES BOTH WITHIN ALAWITE COMMUNITY AND BETWEEN ALAWITES AND SUNNIS MAY BE INCREASING WITHIN CONTEXT OF ISSUES WHICH HAVE ACCUMULATED SINCE EARLY 1976 -- LEBANON,

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ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, CORRUPTION, SECTARIANISM AND INTERNAL SECURITY. JUDGING FROM ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATIONS IN PAST FEW MONTHS, AL-ASSAD'S OPPONENTS ARE ORGANIZED, POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED AND ABLE TO MOUNT THEIR OPERATIONS WITH RELATIVE IMPUNITY. BUT THEY ARE APPARENTLY TOO FEW IN NUMBER TO ENGAGE IN ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITIES BEYOND SELECTIVE

ASSASSINATION. THE INCIDENTS HAVE GENERATED AN AIR OF EXPECTATION IN DAMASCUS THAT MORE INCIDENTS WILL BE FORTH-COMING. THE OUTER BREACHES OF THE REGIMEERS DEFENSES MAY HAVE BEEN PENETRATED, BUT AL-ASSAD REMAINS IN CONTROL OF THE ARMY AND SECURITY APPARATUS, HAS RECEIVED FRESH INFUSIONS OF SAUDI ASSISTANCE AND APPEARS DETERMINED TO PULL HIS REGIME THROUGH ITS CURRENT DIFFICULTIES.END SUMMARY.

2. THE ASSASSINATION OF BRIG. ABD AL-KARIM RAZZUQ AFTERNNON OF JUNE 18 HAS CREATED A MAJOR POLITICAL STIR IN SYRIA, AND HAS GENERATED A SENSE OF EXPECTATION THAT MORE SUCH INCIDENTS WILL OCCUR. RAZZUQ'S ASSASSINATION HAS BEEN THE PRIMARY TOPIC OF CONVERSATION AMONG DAMASCENES THE PAST FEW DAYS; VARIOUS VERSIONS OF THE KILLING HAVE SPREAD, AND DETAILS ARE BEING SIFTED FOR CLUES TO ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.

3. THE ASSASSINATION.

ALL SOURCES GENERALLY AGREE THAT RAZZUQ WAS MURDERED ABOUT 1500L JUNE 18 OUTSIDE HIS HOME IN MEZZE. ACCOUNTS OF THE MURDER DIFFER IN NUMBER OF ASSASSINS -- FROM

ONE TO THREE -- WHETHER HE WAS MURDERED BY GUN OR KNIFE (MOST BELIEVE FORMER), AND HOW MANY BULLETS HE RECEIVED (FIGURE VARIES FROM ONE TO 30.)

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4. THE SARG RESPONSE.

MASSIVE FUNERAL PROCESSION MOVED THROUGH DAMASCUS JUNE 19 ACCOMPANYING RAZZUQ'S BODY ON WAY TO CEMETARY, BUT AS OF JUNE 25, SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE NOT REFERRED TO ASSASSINATION. SECURITY AUTHORITIES INITIALLY DETAINED PEOPLE FROM RAZZUQ'S NEIGHBORHOOD FOR QUESTIONING. EMBOFF WAS TOLD JUNE 22 BY OFFICERS FROM MININTERIOR CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DIVISION THAT CID HAS ALL ITS MANPOWER INVESTIGATING THE CASE, AND ALSO THAT SARG OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN WARNED TO BE MORE DISCREET IN THEIR MOVEMENTS. LOCAL LAWYER ASSERTED JUNE 22 THAT FOUR MEN SUSPECTED OF MURDERING RAZZUQ HAD BEEN DETAINED.

5. THE EGYPTIAN REACTION.

WITHIN TWO-THREE HOURS OF INCIDENT, NEWS ABOUT IT HAD SPREAD AMONG DAMASCENES. EGYPTIAN PRESS ACCOUNT OF KILLING, CITED BY ISRAELI AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL MEDIA JUNE 19, TRANSMITTED NEWS TO ALL PARTS OF SYRIA. ACCORDING TO AL-BAATH SOURCE, EGYPTIAN PRESS DELEGATION WAS MEETING

WITH SANA DIRECTOR SABIR FALHUT AFTERNOON JUNE 19 WHEN FALHUT RECEIVED PHONE CALL REPORTING THE MURDER. FALHUT PASSED ALONG INITIAL DETAILS, WHICH DELEGATION THEN RELAYED TO CAIRO. IN VIEW OF MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOUI, EGYPTIAN MEDIA PUBLICITY ACCORDED TO RAZZUQ'S MURDER IS A SIGN THAT SYRO-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS ARE STILL MARKED BY UNDERLYING TENSIONS TO EXTENT THAT EGYPTIANS WASTED NO TIME IN PUBLISHINGNEWS THAT GOE REALIZED WOULD EMBARRASS DAMASCUS REGIME.

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED DIA, SECDEF AND USCINCEUR.

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

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6. OMENS ACCOMPANYING THE ASSASSINATION.

ACCORDING TO SHOUI, BODIES OF TWO MEN FROM HAMA SENTENCED BY SUPREME STATE SECURITY COURT TO DEATH FOR THEIR ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN ASSASSINATION OF DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY RECTOR DR. MUHAMMAD AL-FADIL HAVE BEEN STOLEN FROM THEIR GRAVES. SHOUI BELIEVES THEY WERE INNOCENT OF CRIME FOR WHICH THEY EXECUTED, AND SAID SOME ASCRIBE RAZZUQ'S MURDER TO VENGEFUL MEMBERS OF TWO VICTIMS' HAMA CLAN. LOCAL AP STRINGER CLAIMED THAT OFFICER IN SYRIAN COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

WAS MURDERED BY PISTOL WITH SILENCER EVENING JUNE 3 IN DAMASCUS; NOTING THAT RAZZUQ APPARENTLY KILLED WITH SIMILAR WEAPON, HE SUGGESTED PROBABILITY THAT BOTH THESE MURDERS WERE PLANNED BY IRAQIS. ONCE SOURCE HAS ALSO TOLD US THAT ALAWITE OFFICER IN HAMA WAS KILLED AFTER RAZZUQ INCIDENT. WE CANNOT CONFIRM EITHER OF THESE
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KILLINGS, BUT THE STORIES SEEM TO BE SPREADING.

7. WHO WAS RAZZUQ?

AS BEST WE CAN ASCERTAIN BRIG. ABD AL-KARIM RAZZUQ WAS A COMMANDER OF SYRIA'S MISSILE DEFENSES, A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER WITH NATURAL LEADERSHIP ABILITIES, AND AN ALAWITE. ACCORDING TO AL-BAATH SOURCE, RAZZUQ WAS

"A LEADER OF MEN," AND "POTENTIAL CHIEF OF STAFF" IN CASE OF A CHANGE OF REGIMES. FORMER DAMASCUS CHIEF OF POLICE TOLD DATT THAT RAZZUQ HEADED A BAATH PARTY ORGANIZATION IN THE PARTY'S MILITARY STRUCTURE. WE HAVE ALSO LEARNED THAT RAZZUQ WAS A MEMBER OF THE KHAYYATUN TRIBE (THE TRIBE OF LATE MAJ. GEN. MUHAMMAD UMRAN AND R. AL-FADIL). WELL-INFORMED BUSINESSMAN TOLD CHARGE THAT RAZZUQ WAS PLAYING KEY ROLE IN CHOOSING SUCCESSOR TO DR. AL-FADIL AS HEAD OF ALAWITE TRIBAL COUNCIL. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, RAZZUQ HAD RECENTLY DECIDED TO SUPPORT CANDIDATE FOR POSITION AS HEAD OF TRIBAL COUNCIL WHO WAS NOT FAVORED BY PRES. AL-ASSAD. THIS SOURCE ADDED THAT RAZZUQ WAS IN TOUCH WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF HADDADUN TRIBE (NOTE: FORMER STRONGMAN SALAL JADID IS PERHAPS MOST PROMINENT POLICIAL FIGURE BELONGING TO HADDADUN).

8. WHO KILLED RAZZUQ?

IT IS NOT CLEAR WHO PERPETRATED LATEST INCIDENT. SOME SUSPICION WILL NATURALLY FALL UPON IRAQIS, BUT REGIME ITSELF HAS NOT RENEWED ITS PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST BAGHDAD. WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, OUR CONTACTS DISCOUNT THIS THEORY. POSSIBILITY THAT MURDER MOTIVATED BY FEELINGS OF VENGEANCE IN RESPONSE TO EXECUTION OF TWO HAMAWITES
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CANNOT BE ENTIRELY DISCOUNTED. LACK OF GUARD AT RAZZUQ'S RESIDENCE, HOWEVER, MEANS THAT HE WAS A RELATIVELY EASY TARGET FOR GROUP TRYING TO MAKE A POLITICAL POINT AT EXPENSE

OF AL-ASSAD REGIME. SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE TOLD DATT ON JUNE 20 THAT HE THOUGHT MUSLIMBRETHERN BEST GUESS. REGUALR SOURCE ALSO REPORTED HE TOLD BY VETERAN (CHRISTIAN) BAATHIST DEPUTY MINISTER THAT ALAWITES WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE CONTINUED MURDERS OF THEIR CO-RELIGIONISTS BY BROTHERHOOD, IMPLYING HE BELIEVED FANATIC MUSLIMS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR CRIME. BUSINESSMAN CITED ABOVE ATTRIBUTED IT TO INTRA-ALAWITE TENSIONS.

9. SECTARIAN STRUGGLE FOR POWER?

MANY OF OUR SOURCES ARE FOCUSING ON LATTER POSSIBILITY, THAT ALAWITES ARE INVOLVED IN INTERNAL FEUDING. THIS THEORY HAD GAINED SOME MOMENTUM EVEN PRIOR TO RAZZUQ'S DEATH. FOR EXAMPLE, WEST EUROPEAN EMBOFF REPORTED TWO SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH LOCAL SUNNIS CONCERNING ALAWITE TRIAL TENSIONS. SYRIAN ARCHEOLOGIST CITING "FRIENDS IN THE ARMY" AS HIS SOURCE, ASSERTED THAT ARMY IS SPLIT IN TWO; ANTI-ASSAD FACTION IN MILITARY IS ORGANIZED AND WAITING FOR OPPORTUNE MOMENT TO MOVE AGAINST REGIME; ALAWITES ARE FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES; RESOLUTION OF THIS STRUGGLE IS GOING TO BE VERY BLOODY. IN SECOND CONVERSATION SYRIAN MEDIA OFFICIAL TOLD SAME EMBOFF THAT ALAWPTES ARE DIVIDED AND AT ODDS WITH EACH OTHER; THERE IS GROUP OF "UMRAN OFFICERS" OPPOSED TO REGIME; SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDER ALI HAYDAR AND GROUP OF FELLOW OFFICERS HAVE STIMULATED EDITORIALS BY ALI SULAYMAN IN AL-THAWRAH CRITICIZING INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AS PART OF ATTEMPT TO UNDERMINE POSITION OF RIF'AT AL-ASSAD; BUT THERE WILL NOT BE A COUP, BECAUSE PRES. AL-ASSAD REMAINS STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND PRESSURES FROM ALLIANCE OF SUNNI AND ALAWITE "UMRAN OFFICERS."

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 DAMASCUS 3970

EXDIS

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10. ONE AL-BAATH SOURCE, WHO IS SUNNI, TOLD US HE HAD MADE "SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY" OF LAST THREE MAJOR ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATIONS -- AL-FADIL, PROFESSOR ALI BADDUR OF ALEPPO (REPORTEDLY A MEMBER OF THE ALAWITE TRIBAL COUNCIL AND SURVIVOR OF ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT) AND RAZZUQ -- AND FOUNFAZHEM LINKED IN A PATTERN. HE CLAIMED ALL THREE MAINTAINED LEADING POSITIONS IN THEIR SECT AND HAD POTENTIAL TO ASSUME GREATER POSITIONS OF POWER IN SARG. HE CONCLUDED THAT AL-ASSAD REGIME WAS INVOLVED IN POWER STRUGGLE WITH ALAWITE OPPONENTS AND HAD PLANNED SOME OF THE ASSASSINATIONS. SUNNI LAWYER ALSO ANALYZED ASSASSINATION AS RESULT OF ALAWITE SQUABBLING, AND REFERRED TO EXISTENCE OF "UMRAN OFFICERS" GROUP. SHOEFI ON JUNE 22 CONFIRMED THAT STORY OF RZZUQ DEATH BEING CAUSED BY INTRA-ALAWITE FEUDING WAS WIDESPREAD IN DAMASCUS, BUT HE SAID HE WAS AS YET UNABLE TO ASCERTAIN WHO WAS BEHIND MURDER.

11. WE ARE STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT SENSITIVE INFORMATION
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ABOUT EXISTENCE OF RIVAL FACTIONS WITHIN THE MILITARY, PARTICULARLY THE "UMRAN OFFICER" GROUP, IS RECEIVING SUCH WIDESPREAD DISSEMINATION AMONG DAMASCENES. THIS HAD NOT BEEN THE CASE IN OUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE. THERE IS FAIR DEGREE OF ACCURACY IN THESE PERCEPTIONS -- ALTHOUGH PERHAPS SOME WISHFUL THINKING ON PART OF SUNNIS -- AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY NOTED IN REPORTING ON "UMRAN OFFICERS" FACTION. GROUP LED BY COL. ALI HAYDAR IS ALSO INVOLVED IN INTERNAL ALAWITE POLITICKING. SHOEFI TOLD US SHORT WHILE AGO, PRIOR TO RAZZUQ MURDER, THAT ALI HAYDAR, ALI UMRAN AND THIRD OFFICER COMPOSED FACTION WHICH WAS CONTEMPLATING MOVE AGAINST REGIME. ACCORDING TO SHOEFI, THEY WERE RELUCTANT TO ACT BECAUSE: A) THEY FEAR THE SUNNIS OF HAMA

WOULD ERUPT AGAINST THE ALAWITES IF AL-ASSAD'S OPPONENTS INITIATED OPEN INTRA-SECTARIAN CONFLICT, AND B) THEY ARE INTIMIDATED BY AL-ASSAD'S MULTIPLICITY OF FOREIGN CONTACTS AND BELIEVE THEY STAND LITTLE CHANCE OF DEPOSING HIM UNLESS THEY CAN OBTAIN FOREIGN BACKING.

12. CONCLUSION.

DESPITE MANY "PET THEORIES," NO CONSENSUS HAS AS YET EMERGED AS TO WHO KILLED RAZZUQ. HIS ASSASSINATION, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO US TO BE FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT THE REGIME CONFRONTS A SMALL NUMBER OF WELL-ORGANIZED OPPONENTS, EITHER WITHIN ALAWITE SECT OR AMONG NON-ALAWITES. EVEN IF SPECULATION THAT REGIME PLANNED RAZZUQ'S ASSASSINATION IS ACCURATE, IT INDICATES AL-282 - \$ # \$ \$3:8\$3\$ 59 43 945 59 ;89)3,:3 59 :74? #8 9009,3,5 ' POWER, AND WOULD CONSTITUTE AN INDIRECT ATTESTATION OF HIS RESPECT FOR THEIR POTENTIAL CAPABILITY TO CAUSE HIM SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEMS. IF MURDER WAS NOT PLANNED BY REGIME, IT INDICATES THAT HIS OPPONENTS ARE NOT ONLY WELL-ORGANIZED BUHUAKE KEYING THEIR ACTIONS TO A POLITICAL STRATEGY. NOT ONLY DO THE
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ASSASSINATIONS CAUSE CONFUSION ON PART OF MANY IN REGIME, BUT THEY GENERATE EXPECTATIONS THAT MORE INCIDENTS WILL TAKE PLACE. THIS SENSE OF EXPECTATION, NOTED BY SHOULFI, HAD PRECEDED EPFRY PREVIOUS COUP IN SYRIA, AND IN HIS VIEW SERVES PURPOSE OF BREAKING DOWN "OUTER DEFENSES" OF REGIME.

13. IN OUR VIEW, THESE SIGNS INDICATE THAT THE AL-ASSAD REGIME IS FACING CHALLENGES FROM SOME DETERMINED OPPONENTS, AND THAT THOSE INVOLVED MAY WELL INCLUDE BOTH ALAWITES AND NON-ALAWITES. THE STRUGGLE SEEMS TO BE UNFOLDING ALONG TRADITIONAL SYRIAN LINES, WITH CONTROL OF THE MILITARY THE GOAL AND WITH GRIEVANCES ACCUMULATED OVER THE PAST YEAR-AND-A-HALF -- INCLUDING LEBANON, SECTARIANISM, ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, CORRUPTION AND INTERNAL SECURITY -- AROUSING THE EMOTIONS OF MANY IN THE POPULACE AND THUS PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR EITHER FURTHER DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION OR A RENEWED EFFORT BY AL-ASSAD TO BOLSTER THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIS REGIME. WHILE HIS OUTER DEFENSES, TO USE SHOULFI'S TERM, MAY HAVE BEEN PIERCED BY RECENT DIFFICULTIES, HIS CENTRAL ELEMENTS OF POWER AND SUPPORT STILL PROVIDE HIM WITH THE NECESSARY TIME TO MAKE USE OF RECENT INFUSIONS OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND TO MEND FENCES WITH THOSE IN THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY WHO ARE DISCONTENT WITH HIS LEADERSHIP. IN ADDITION, DESPITE REFERENCE TO FACTIONS IN THE MILITARY -- A NORMAL STATE OF AFFAIRS IN SYRIA -- WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT AL-ASSAD HAS LOST CONTROL OF THE MILITARY AND SECURITY

APPARATUS. AS LEADER OF THE PARAMOUNT COALITION IN SYRIA, WITH WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN ARMY AND GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS, AS WELL AS POPULACE AT LARGE, HE REMAINS DETERMINED TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING HIS REGIME AND DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY WILL NOT AFFECT HIS ABILITY TO SPEAK FOR SYRIA DURING FORTHCOMING EFFORTS TO MOVE THE PEACE PROCESS FORWARD.

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Message Attributes

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